



SPLAT

FUTURES THINKING TOOLKIT

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Getting Started

This Toolkit is for You

Libraries are in a Position to Reflect on the Future

While libraries have existed for thousands of years, there has never been a better time to reflect on and plan for the future of libraries than right now. There has been a dramatic shift underway to digital services and delivery models which are enhancing access for patrons but sometimes creating new challenges for libraries. Despite the growing relevance and use of libraries in communities across the country, library staff are increasingly asked to do more with less as budgets grow tighter.

Libraries are essential to providing people access to information, and they are also one of the last spaces that are open to everybody. In a world where nearly everything is monetized and it is often hard to find a place to sit or a bathroom to use without paying money for it, the library opens its doors and provides its resources for free. This commitment to inclusivity helps libraries adapt in changing times, but also pressures them to be all things to all people with limited resources.

In short, as important as libraries are, many remain underfunded and the challenges facing libraries and the people who work in them are real, complex, and varied.

Futures Thinking Is an Approach You Can Use

We crafted this toolkit to introduce a way of thinking that will strengthen your library and community by preparing your staff for what might come in the future. It is an invitation to investigate possible changes and their impacts. It is called strategic foresight or futures thinking. This way of thinking encourages participants to imagine a variety of possible futures, rather than trying to

predict a single future. At the completion of the process, participants, having thought about a variety of scenarios, are better prepared to engage with an unpredictable future. Several other industries, particularly business and technology, have used this forward-thinking approach for several years to design and plan for their preferred future. In this toolkit, we have curated three ways to integrate futures thinking into your library which you will find in the following chapters.

A Call to Action

As someone working in libraries, we hope it is your mission to improve your community by facilitating access to knowledge. In order to continuously change and improve the library's offerings to the community, you will want to have a deep understanding of the current and future needs of your community. No one understands your community as well as you, and no one is in a better position to envision the future of library work.

We know your days are busy and the demands of working in the library are high, but that's all the more reason to engage with new ways of thinking. It may seem as though positive change is difficult or impossible, but futures thinking tells us that the future hasn't been decided yet, and we can play a role in influencing which path the future takes. We hope you'll join us!

About SPLAT

The creation of the Special Projects Library Action Team, or SPLAT, was the outcome of a visioning session held in 2005. The members of SPLAT represent different types of libraries, positions in libraries, and different regions of Idaho. SPLAT members serve as change agents planted across the state, and they often help to push new ideas into the library community. By joining the group, SPLAT members pledge to build their own expertise in innovative practices, share their expertise and experiences with their colleagues in the Idaho library community, and use their expertise with library patrons in their community on a regular basis.

Since 2017, SPLAT has been focusing on futures thinking and how we can bring this exciting idea to libraries and library staff across the state.

How This Toolkit Works

This toolkit is divided into five chapters: an introductory chapter, a guide for using The Futures Thinking Playbook with teens in a library, a guide for book displays on futures thinking, a guide for using futures thinking in professional development, and a final chapter with additional resources. Each guide includes programs and activities that you can use in your library, in addition to a list of resources for further reading and research.

A Note on Toolkit Development

Like most SPLAT projects, this one started with a brainstorming activity. We divided our team into three groups and asked each group to come up with a focus area they wanted to learn more about to incorporate futures thinking into libraries. This exercise resulted in the topics of this toolkit. Over several months, each group worked independently to develop the content for their topic as a guide that could help a library worker understand more about futures thinking. Each section was then combined into a cohesive toolkit.



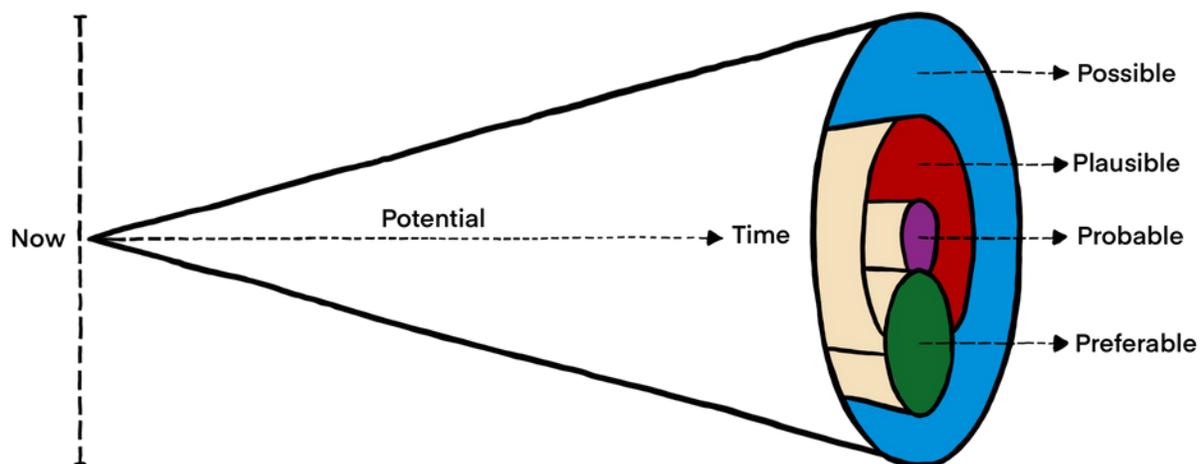
**SPLAT leaders
Deana Brown
(foreground) and
Annie Gaines
(background)
assembled the parts
of the toolkit and
brainstormed next
steps.**

What is Futures Thinking?

Futures Thinking Is a Discipline, a Tool, and a Mindset

Futures thinking is a way of thinking about the future in a structured way. By using divergent thinking, or seeking many possible answers and acknowledging uncertainty, it allows us to consider all the possible, plausible, probable, and preferable futures. As a discipline, a tool, and a mindset, futures thinking provides techniques to help you think about the forces that are shaping the future, explore the implications of those forces, and use that information to make decisions today that will influence the future.

As much we would like it to, futures thinking does not allow us to predict the future. It doesn't argue for one correct future or that the future is predetermined, but instead argues that there is a range of possible futures and the future can be actively shaped by the choices we make today. Futures thinking seeks to answer the question of "What could happen?" rather than "What will happen?". One useful tool of futures thinking is the cone of plausibility, which helps us to graphically represent that over time the number of possible, plausible, probable, and preferable futures grows. The further we get from our present moment, the more potential futures there are.



A cone of plausibility or futures cone is one way to visualize the different possible, plausible, probable, and preferable futures over time. (McGregor, 2020)

The Futures Thinking Process

There are a variety of options when it comes to a process you might use to engage with futures thinking. Two we have explored at the Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL) are from the [University of Houston's Professional Certificate in Foresight course](#) and the [Institute for the Future's free Coursera course, "Ready, Set, Future! Introduction to Futures Thinking."](#)

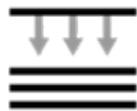
The method put forward by Andy Hines in the Certificate in Foresight course through the University of Houston has six main steps to follow when applying the foresight methodology to a project:

1. Framing - Develop a scope for the project and complete an assessment of the current environment.
2. Scanning - Searching for signals of change and specific future inputs.
3. Futuring - Identifying a baseline and alternative futures.
4. Visioning - Exploring the implications of future scenarios and committing to one.
5. Designing - Crafting options and an integrated strategic approach.
6. Adapting - Communications, ongoing monitoring, and implementation.



Framing

Scoping the project, defining the focal issue and current conditions



Scanning

Exploring signals of change or indicators of the futures



Futuring

Identifying a baseline and alternative futures



Visioning

Developing and committing to a preferred future



Designing

Developing prototypes, offerings or artifacts to achieve the vision and goals



Adapting

Enabling organizations to generate options to alternatives futures

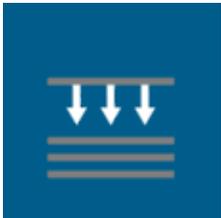
The six main steps of foresight methodology according to Andy Hines. From a blog post titled, "Evolution of Framework Foresight (part 1)." ([source](#))

Scenario: the library is running out of space, what should we do?



FRAMING

- Establish a scope for the project: Are we considering totally new construction, like a new branch? Are we only considering expanding the current building? Do we just need more storage space, or do we also need bigger rooms for programs? What is the scope of this project? What are our limitations in considering what we can do to solve this issue?
 - Assess the current environment: How is the library currently used? How much impact does a lack of space have on library operations? How much need is there in the community and how could the library meet that need? What are other libraries in similar communities doing?
-



SCANNING

- Search for signals of change: What is changing in the community that could impact the library? Is there significant population growth in the area? What are the trends?
 - Consider future inputs: What could happen in the future that could significantly impact the library's plans? What if a new factory opens up nearby and the population grows? Are you anticipating significant financial donations to the library in the coming years?
-



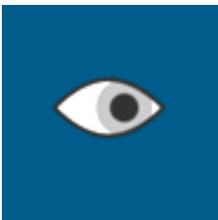
FUTURING

- Identify a baseline: Since late 2020, library use statistics have been steadily increasing each year, and we predict that growth to stay relatively the same. Our baseline assumption is that library use will continue to increase over time, and the town's population is expected to steadily increase as well. We also

FUTURING, CONTINUED

expect that the community will continue to have a positive outlook toward the library, as we have a great relationship now. In this future, the library is a valued resource that is used often by the community.

- Identify alternative futures:
 - Growth - In 10 years, a new factory is built just outside of the town, which brings in several thousand new families to your community in a short amount of time. Storytime is so full of children that the fire department is worried about the room reaching capacity.
 - Collapse - In 10 years, our economy falls into a depression and many people lose their jobs. The library is asked to cut its budget by 50% even as it sees use of its resources skyrocket. The computer lab has never been so busy.
 - Transformation - In 10 years, Idaho and Oregon merge to become a new state. The library, as a government entity, is reshuffled into a new county government that is used to doing things in a slightly different way. All of the library's policies have to be rewritten.
 - Discipline - In 10 years, new laws are created that strictly regulate the material that libraries can have in their collections, and, as a result, community use of the library is dramatically reduced. As materials become less relevant, events and discussions become more popular.



VISIONING

- Explore the implications of future scenarios: Using the data we've collected so far, there are several good options to work with: expand the existing library building, build a second branch location, buy/lease an existing physical location and transform it into a branch library, or invest in a bookmobile.
- Committing to one: After much consideration and discussion, the board decided to go with the plan to buy/lease an existing physical location and transform it into a branch library.



DESIGNING

- **Creating options:** There are several great options to consider when looking at buying/leasing an existing location and transforming it into a new branch library. Location A is on the west side of town where there is a lot of new population growth, in a strip mall next to a grocery store. Location B is on the east side of town where there is also a lot of new population growth, in a standalone building that will need some repair. Location C is on the north side of town where there is less population growth, but property is more affordable. And location D is on the south side of town close to a school.
 - **Creating an integrated strategic approach:** Given these options, what does the library value most? At this stage the library would need to pick a location and start working toward the goal of making it a functional branch library. It is essential to create a strategic plan to organize this process.
-



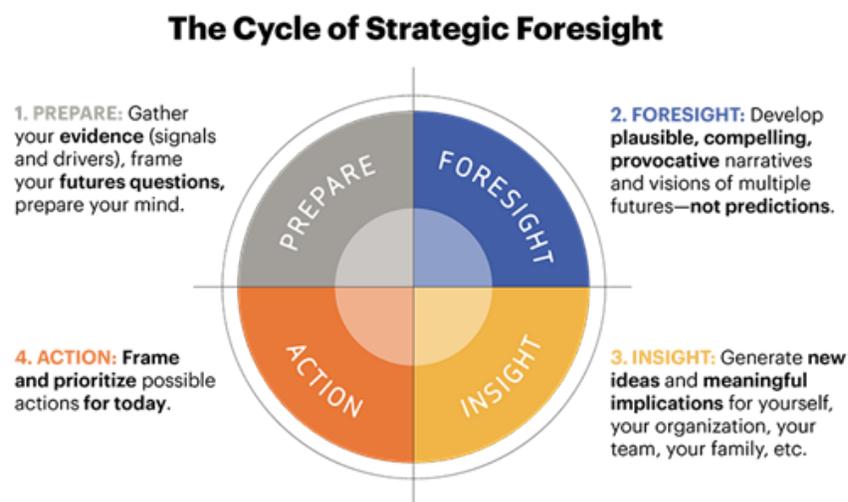
ADAPTING

- **Communications:** Once a plan has been decided upon, the library needs to start communicating its intentions to stakeholders and the community. Communicating about the project will be a continuous process.
- **Monitoring:** It is important to monitor the project to ensure that the various pieces are in place and systems are working as they should. In a project as large as this one, it is important to keep an eye on it.
- **Implementation:** Once the project is completed, the library will have a new, functional branch in a new location, designed to meet the needs of the community it serves.

It might help to think of the first three steps of the process as mapping and the last three as influencing. The mapping phase sets out a process to gather information that will help you identify what futures are likely. The influencing phase is where you choose your preferred future and create a plan of how you, or your library, will influence future events to reach that preferred future.

There are many parts of this six-step process. A helpful component is using a STEEP analysis to look at future trends. STEEP is an acronym for social, technological, economic, environmental, and political. Looking at future trends in these five areas is an important part of the futures thinking process.

Another model put forward by Jane McGonigal in the [Institute for the Future's free Coursera course, "Ready, Set, Future! Introduction to Futures Thinking"](#) is the cycle of strategic foresight.



The Cycle of Strategic Foresight according to the Institute for the Future. (source)

This model is cyclical, rather than linear, and has fewer steps. In the “prepare” phase of the cycle, you can think of evidence and signals as anything that makes you curious about what is causing a situation. In the “foresight” phase, you boldly imagine what future might come. The “insight” phase gives you the opportunity to imagine how you or your organization might be impacted in those futures. Finally, in the “action” phase, you will determine actions that can get you and your organization to the future you want.

If these processes feel overwhelming, here are a few questions from the [free e-book, “Introduction to Strategic Foresight”](#) that might get you started:

- What is driving our system?
- What are the underlying structural relationships?
- What is already in the pipeline?
- What would be the role of our organization in the future?

Futures Thinking in Practice

You might be wondering, “What does all of this look like when put to use in libraries?” To answer that question, here are two examples of how the ICfL has incorporated futures thinking into in-person events.

Futures Camp

Library staff from throughout Idaho gathered in June 2019 at a unique three-day summer camp to dream, envision, and shape the future of libraries. Within the award-winning Cruzen-Murray Library on the historic College of Idaho campus in Caldwell, Idaho, campers united to engage with emerging trends, build connections, experience a variety of hands-on activities, listen to inspiring keynote speakers, and participants developed a plan to take their learning back to their library. Details from the event, including the agenda, recordings, and activity journal can be found on the [ICfL’s Futures Camp website](#).



Participants at the 2019 Futures Camp.

Futures Thinking Room

“Welcome to the future!” is how attendees were greeted by the Special Projects Library Action Team (SPLAT) during the Idaho Library Association’s 2022 annual conference in Lewiston, Idaho. SPLAT members came together to host an interactive, imaginative experience where attendees were asked to envision what libraries might be like in 10 years.

Two different future scenarios were presented for participants to think about. On day one, after walking through a black curtain, participants were given images of a deteriorating world. They were then asked to imagine a future where society has collapsed, and libraries no longer have physical spaces. It was a little difficult to think about such a bleak future. However, the great thing about taking the time to think through this scenario is that we will be better prepared for such a future, even if only parts of it come to pass.

On day two, after walking through a colorful futuristic curtain, participants were asked to imagine a future in which a former library director has been elected President of the United States, and libraries now have unlimited federal funding. What a contrast from day one! On both days, we asked participants to focus their ideas on these topics: what would the role of the library in the community be; and what kind of job titles, patron services, technology, and library services would there be in this future? These prompts were loosely based on the STEEP categories used in futures thinking (social, technical, economic, environmental, and political).

In reviewing what participants wrote, we noticed a few trends. These included: variations on the theme of libraries serving as the resource and information hub for their communities; library staff as storytellers or advisors; and low-tech things such as bicycles, along with high-tech items like Virtual Reality (VR). We were struck by the similarities between what library staff do now and what participants envisioned them doing in the future. Some of the pieces and topics might be different, but at its core, participants all saw libraries and their staff as a key part of their communities. What job titles, services, technology, or roles do you imagine for each of the two scenarios? The results from our two-day activity are shared in an [article](#) from an issue of the [Curiosity Report](#), SPLAT’s bimonthly newsletter.

COLLAPSE SCENARIO PATRON SERVICES



GROWTH SCENARIO PATRON SERVICES



Participant responses from the futures thinking room.

Left: collapse scenario, patron services.

Right: growth scenario, patron services.

Why Is This Valuable for Librarians?

Take a moment and think of the skills and aptitudes you think successful library staff might possess. The [Institute for the Future's free Coursera course, "Ready, Set, Future! Introduction to Futures Thinking"](#) lays out seven key strengths that futures thinking helps build:

1. Creativity
2. Foresight
3. Mental Flexibility
4. Empathy
5. Practical Skepticism
6. Strategy
7. Hope

We'll assume at least one of those strengths is on your list. That means according to your own list, building futures thinking strengths is a way to build and strengthen the capabilities of library staff.

With all the speculation concerning what the future of libraries will be, thinking strategically about the future is becoming an increasingly important skill. Practicing futures thinking enables those who work in libraries to develop meaningful and achievable goals as well as the strategies to attain them. That could be in individual career or life planning, learning life skills to meet anticipated needs, and creating individual goals. For the library, that could also mean strategic planning, preparing for the future, and considering trends when making decisions. Futures thinking can help community members feel prepared and empowered to anticipate and plan for what's to come.



A venn diagram of the benefits of futures thinking for individuals, libraries, and the community.

What Can You Use It For? Who Uses This?

You can use futures thinking to consider any challenge.

This toolkit is intended for people who work in any type of library to utilize to begin thinking about and engaging with futures thinking in their work and in their lives. Our hope is that by thinking about the future in a strategic way, library workers will be better prepared to craft their preferred futures and work toward them, whether that's in a professional or personal setting.

Futures Thinking & Teens

The future looms large in the lives of most teenagers. As youth on the cusp of adulthood, the structured lives they have known are coming to an end. The choices they make as new adults may shape the course of their entire lives. For teens, the ability to strategically think about the future has immense value. Learning how to assess what is and is not likely to change can help them make better decisions. Other potential benefits include:

- Reduced stress.
- Better problem-solving.
- Increased motivation.
- A more open-minded outlook.
- Improved collaboration.
- Learning how to strategically reflect on the past, as well as the future.

Despite these benefits, the ability to think about the future is a skill seldom taught purposefully. In this chapter, you will find ideas and resources to help you foster futures thinking skills in the teens of your community. Central to this work is the Futures Thinking Playbook by Katie King and Julia Rose West. This playbook uses 16 activities, spread across four larger challenges, to make the concepts of futures thinking accessible and teachable to teens. Physical copies are available for purchase online. You can also freely view it online here: <https://issuu.com/wtforesight/docs/futuresthinkingplaybook-final>

Getting Teens on Board

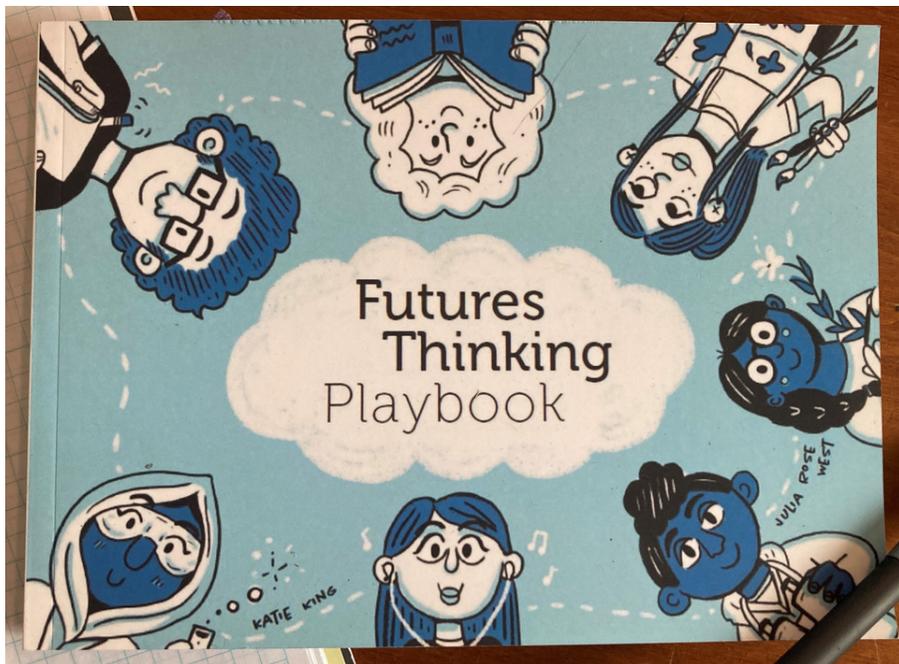
Before you can teach teens how to think about the future, you need to get them to show up. Teens are busy, and they won't give their time to something unless it catches their interest. Your first challenge, then, is to present futures thinking as something:

1. Interesting.
2. Important.
3. Easy to engage with.

The best way to do this will depend on your organization and how you usually engage with teen library users. School librarians may be able to partner with teachers or take advantage of lunchtime visitors to the library to get teens to show up. Staff at a public library, with its own teen advisory board, may need to get buy-in from the teens on the board before they can get a program off the ground. Take time to consider how best to promote your program. How will teens find out what you're offering? What will get them through the door?

The Futures Thinking Playbook

This chapter of the toolkit is centered around the Futures Thinking Playbook, which is a guide for anyone who wants to help a group of any age learn to think about the future in a more explicit and meaningful way. It was created by Katie King and Julia Rose West, in collaboration with the nonprofit group, Teach the Future. Teach the Future's mission is to bring futures thinking to students and schools, globally. Although the playbook is applicable for people of any age, teens are well-positioned to immediately apply its lessons to their own lives.



The Futures Thinking Playbook by Katie King and Julia Rose West, 2018.

The playbook is divided into four challenges: define, gather, imagine, and reflect. Each is composed of three to five activities called “plays.” Plays generally take 30 minutes to an hour to complete. You can pick and choose activities or work through the playbook in sequence. Many of the plays build on what teens have done in previous activities. As written, the group of students will pick out a topic to explore throughout the playbook. However, the playbook is meant to be adapted, and it’s relatively easy to approach the plays à la carte. In the next section, we’ll cover a few different ways that you can use content from the playbook.

Ideas for Using the Playbook

Here are some ideas for adapting the playbook’s different plays and concepts into library programs. These are divided into active and passive programs.

Active Programs

Futures Thinking Book Club - A good program for a dedicated/regular audience. The group will read a book, watch a movie, or play a game chosen ahead of time. During the program, you work through one of the plays or concepts from the playbook and then connect it to the chosen book/movie/game.

A Repeating Futures Thinking Series - This approach requires a more consistent audience. Each session, you work through one of the plays from the playbook with your group. Starting with the first challenge, you’ll work through the entire playbook. Although this is a more long-form approach, the teens will be able to pick a shared topic and explore it together. At the end of the series, host a party to celebrate and reflect on their work. This could be offered each quarter or as often as interest supports.

Present the Plays Individually - With a bit of editing, the individual plays work well as standalone activities. Because the playbook assumes that later challenges revolve around a shared topic, you’ll need to pick a topic with your group or make adjustments so that it can work without a shared topic. You can take a more literal approach to these programs, but it can be fun to adapt them more creatively. For example, Play 15, “Hero for the Future,” can be

adapted as a zine-making activity.

The Quiet Year – In this one, which is more loosely connected to futures thinking, you'll play a game of *The Quiet Year* by Avery Alder. It is a map-drawing game in which players imagine a small community in the wake of a civilization-ending crisis. They have a single year to rebuild. They decide on community projects and respond to unexpected events. Each game takes two to four hours to complete, so you may need to split this into multiple sessions. You need a large piece of paper, a standard deck of cards, writing utensils for each player, and lots of dice or counters to track time.

Futures Thinking Poetry Slam - Invite your teens to participate in a slam based on futures thinking (FT). You might need to do a bit of groundwork to get them on the same page. Maybe have a program through which you briefly introduce some FT concepts -- a short game like *The Next 5 Minutes* or *The Thing from the Future* are great for this. Then challenge the teens to prepare a poem to present at the next session. They should be short, one to two minutes. Remind the teens to adhere to any restrictions your library has on mature language!

Passive Programs

Rotating Futures Thinking Games - Each week, put out a simple game to help teach FT concepts. Many of these can be adapted from the playbook. Along with the game, post two to three titles of other games and let the teens vote on which game to put out next week.

Shared Futures Thinking Reflection Board - Each week, share a prompt in the teen space asking the teens to respond to a question about the future. You can use a white board, magnet poetry, or some other forum for sharing responses.

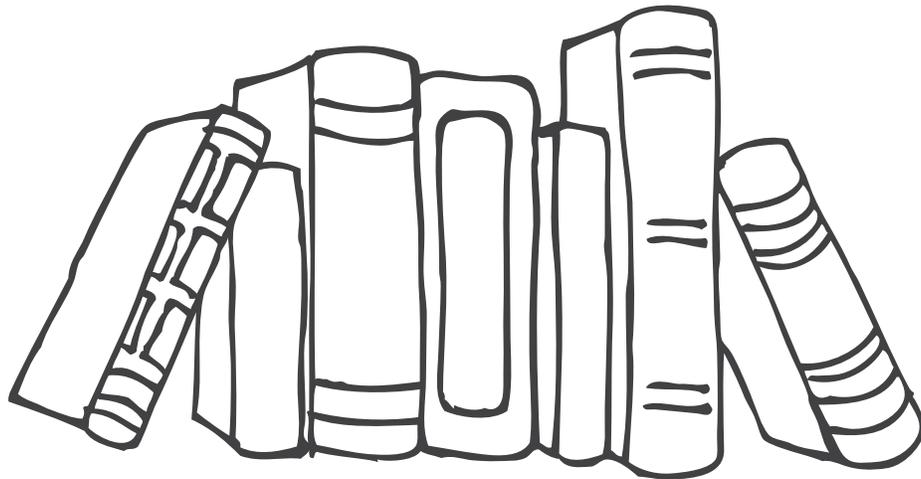
Views of the Future Quiz - Based on Play 1, "Views of the Future," this passive program plays off of the popularity of personality quizzes. By answering two questions, teens find out their own view of the future (out of four possibilities). For each one, you can then provide a follow-up prompt to get them thinking about how this perspective might be a strength.

Resources

King, K. & West, J. R. (2018). Futures Thinking Playbook. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. ([online version](#))

Additional resources are available in Chapter 5: Additional Resources.

Book Displays on Futures Thinking



Libraries routinely use book displays to highlight their collections, and these displays have a positive effect on circulation. There are two main reasons for this:

“First, placing books in a prime display location increases their visibility and accessibility, making them more likely to be noticed and, ultimately, chosen by browsers . . . Second, displays are thought to help narrow readers’ choices by guiding them to a small collection of titles, thus, overcoming the effects of information overload.”

(Baker, 1986)

A book display can be a great way to introduce the concept of futures thinking to patrons. Here are some display ideas.

Display Ideas

Templates – A template can help you streamline the process of creating a new theme when you switch out a display. One option for designing templates is Canva, a web-based graphic design platform (there is a free and paid version). Canva has premade templates that you can easily customize with your library-specific info, and colors, fonts, logo, etc. (Canva has a wide variety of templates, including for the materials highlighted below – posters and infographics.) Once you have created the template of your choice, you can quickly modify it to advertise a different theme. It also helps people to see that there is a continuing topic with different themes, so they look forward to the next one.

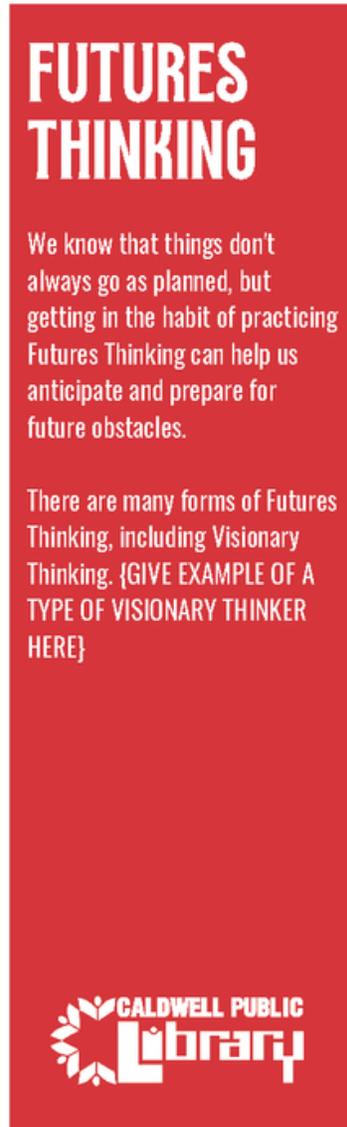
The following examples were created in Canva by Caldwell Public Library Marketing Specialist Haley Westbrook.



A book display featuring two posters about futures thinking, bookmarks with information about futures thinking, and three books available for checkout.

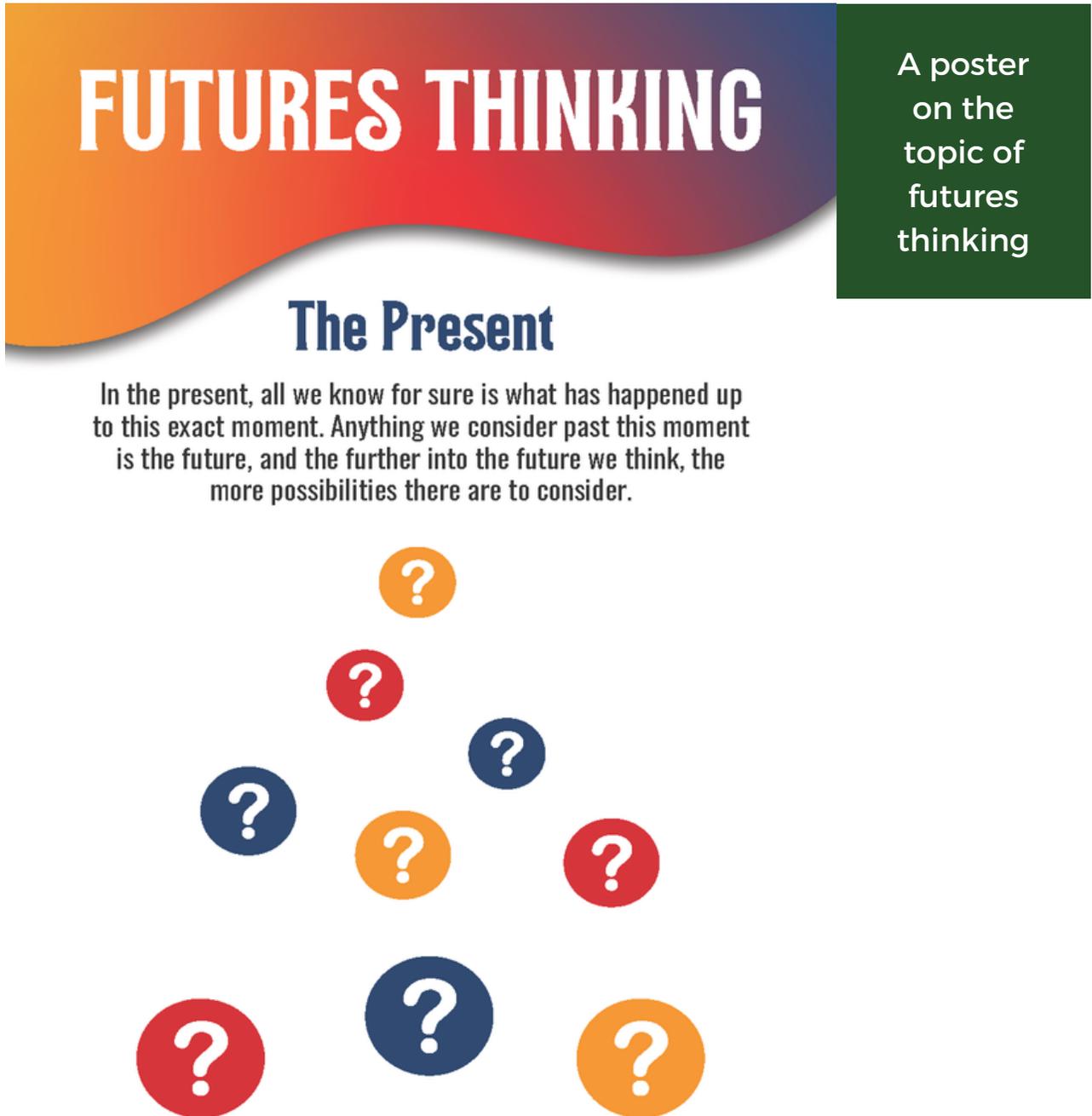
We've made all of the templates created by Haley Westbrook available as editable PDFs. Links to them can be found at the end of this chapter.

Reading Recommendation Bookmarks - Bookmarks are a great way for patrons to explore themes and share that information with others. Bookmarks can be included on the display table, area of your choice, and/or inserted into the books on display. Recommended reading themes include books about inventors, visionaries, and futurists. You can browse various bookmark templates and themes on Canva.



Example bookmarks on the topic of futures thinking. The blue bookmark lists inventors. The red bookmark features visionary thinkers. And the yellow bookmark lists library resources available on the topic of futures thinking.

Display Posters, Infographics, or Signage Themes - Posters, infographics, or passive programming add the last little bit of information needed to round out your display. While there are some examples provided, I also like keeping the posters open for anyone who has more time to be extra creative. You can also consider adding a [QR code](#) to a poster, infographic, or to the bookmarks!



The Future

Being able to think about a variety of possible outcomes when we consider different scenarios helps us anticipate what problems and opportunities we could face. This allows us to not only plan for the future, but it also allows us to try to influence the type of future we want to see.

A poster
on the
topic of
futures
thinking



Imagine a scenario



Brainstorm all the different futures that scenario could bring forth



Consider how you would prepare for and react to the different futures



Think about what you can do now to try to enact a favorable future



Repeat! We can't predict the future, but we can try to be prepared. The more scenarios you consider, the more prepared you might feel for whatever the future holds

FUTURES THINKING

Some display theme ideas:

- Inventor display -- around famous inventors, such as Nikola Tesla, Alexander Graham Bell, or Steve Jobs. For more information, [check out this article](#) listing 15 popular inventors.

- Visionary display -- around business visionaries, such as Salman Khan or Bill Gates. For more information, [check out this article](#) listing 10 popular visionaries.
- Futurists display -- around famous futurists, such as Michio Kaku or Ray Kurzweil. For more information, [check out this article](#) listing 10 groundbreaking futurists.
- Futures thinking game display -- Create a display featuring one of the futures thinking games listed below. You can use prompts and questions from the activities to create passive activities that fit with a display format.

Display Ideas / Cutouts (Cricut cut, origami, other paper builds) – To make the display pop, include some fun, physical items that don't cost a lot and are easy to replace. You may not even have to change out the displays each time you rotate to a new theme since some would fit into the overall theme of futures thinking. Included below are some links to fun designs!

Some ideas for different theme items are included below:

- Origami robots -- Learn how to fold your own [origami robots](#).
- Origami spaceship -- Learn how to fold your own [origami spaceships](#) (video).
- Robot papercraft -- If your library has a cutting machine, you can download the SVG files to cut out and make your own paper robot treat box. Tutorial and files available [here](#).



Two robots made of folded paper with simple designs drawn on them.

Programming Display Options

Active Program Ideas

These games and activities are great to use in an active program or event.

World Game (International Futures Forum)

- This collaborative role-playing game is about sustainability and resilience and is designed for groups wanting to place their activity into a wide view of current global challenges. It is a fun way to engage in the big picture of what is happening and what might happen in our world that we will need to respond to.
- 4, 6, or 12 players. 1-4 hours.

The Thing from the Future (Situation Lab)

- This award-winning imagination game challenges players to collaboratively and competitively describe objects from a range of alternative futures.
- 1-6 players.
- CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Decode the Future (Future Today Institute)

- This game helps players practice thinking through future scenarios as they rehearse uncertainty. Players learn how to rapidly imagine what's possible in the future and how those possibilities might impact them.
- Teams of 4-6 people, all ages.

Futures Cone (Jisc)

- The futures cone is a brainstorming exercise for exploring the future. It involves sorting ideas about the future by time, likelihood, and desirability.
- 4-30 people, 1-2 hours.

Futures Thinking Teachers Pack (Future Lab)

- The Futures Thinking Teaching Pack supports teachers and learners in developing approaches for exploring the future that are not about making predictions but about considering possible, probable, and preferable futures in order to support action and decision-making in the present. The activities

in the pack encourage students to critically examine their place in the world, the structures and features that bring about the societies they live in, their own beliefs, and their agency in shaping their preferable future. Includes 15 classroom activities, each with supporting materials.

The Futures Bazaar (Situation Lab)

- The Futures Bazaar is a creative gathering where people transform everyday objects into unique “artifacts from the future” to provoke, amuse, and inspire one another. Every participant helps imagine and produce these future artifacts, and every artifact tells a story.
- 12-100 people, 3-4 hours.

The First Five Minutes (Institute for the Future)

- What will you do when the next “unthinkable” change happens? The First Five Minutes of the Future is a future-forecasting game developed by the Institute for the Future Director of Game Research and Development Jane McGonigal.
- Groups of any size. 5-10 minutes.
- CC BY-NC 4.0

Passive Program Ideas

Using a white board, a large piece of paper, or a wall for sticky notes, you can adapt these passive programs into your display space to encourage library patrons to consider their future in a casual way.

Take a 10-Year Vacation (Imaginable by Jane McGonigal)

- When you think about the next 10 years, do you think things will mostly stay the same and go on as normal? Or do you expect that most of us will dramatically rethink and reinvest in how we do things? Rate your outlook on a scale of 1 to 10. (1 is the same and 10 is different.)

Imagine the Future (Imaginable by Jane McGonigal)

- Scenario 1: You wake up and it's 10 years from now, and it is a holiday called Thank You Day. You receive \$2,000 from the government. You can keep half and donate the other half to a frontline worker on a national registry (health care workers, teachers, public librarians, firefighters, park employees, city bus drivers, and farmworkers are included). Imagine waking up on a day like this.

Would you accept the money? If you choose not to participate, your funds will be returned to the government.

- What was your first reaction when you heard of the idea of Thank You Day? Did you love it, or did you hate it and why?
- Who might feel badly on Thank You Day?
- Could something like this actually happen?
- Scenario 2: Ten years from today you wake up to an announcement from the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, which released its asteroid forecast. There is an asteroid approaching Earth. The likelihood of a catastrophic event has gone from 1% to 5%. It is three years away, and the government has determined an area of impact depending on where the Earth is in its rotation. It could wipe out an entire city or country depending on the size of the asteroid, and you live in the area of impact. Scientists are working on a plan to minimize the impact, but will the plan work?
 - Would you evacuate? What kinds of actions would you take in the coming weeks to prepare?
 - Would you make an effort to learn about the science of asteroid detection or leave it to the experts?
 - What are the risks of telling the public about a future asteroid impact?

Resources

Books

Juvenile - Non-Fiction

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Life/Career Planning

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Organizational Change

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Picture Books

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- Clarke, A. C. (1968). 2001: a space odyssey. The New American Library.
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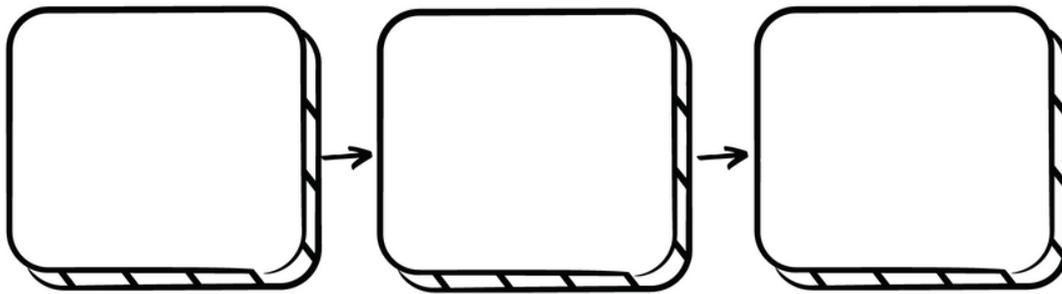
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Downloads

- [Futures thinking bookmarks \(PDF\)](#)
- [Futures thinking posters 11x17 \(PDF\)](#)

Additional resources are available in Chapter 5: Additional Resources.

Futures Thinking and Staff Development



Why Futures Thinking?

In career planning or staff development, it can be comforting to assume that the nature of your job or career won't change much in the next five, 10, or 15 years. With futures thinking, however, you have the tools to consider where your organization or field will be in the future and focus your professional development and career growth on that anticipated path.

Futures thinking does not attempt to predict the future. Instead, it uses innovative and exploratory thinking to look at a range of possible futures, which allows you to create paths to the future you most desire. Using these tools, you can actively shape your or your organization's steps to ensure a good outcome. Futures thinking is about considering the life you want to live and developing steps to attain your goals, whether this be your own personal career or a desire to see the world change for the better.

The shift to using futures thinking for career development helps organizations lean into the future and employees envisioning possible career paths, providing a feeling of agency. When you think about it, nearly every decision we make is based on assumptions we've made about the future.

Here are some principles from futures thinking to help guide staff development:

There are multiple possible futures.

Futures thinking accounts for all possibilities: good, bad, and everything in between. It can help to use different frames to organize different future scenarios, such as: growth, collapse, discipline, and transformation.

Change can be fast and slow.

Dramatic and sudden change grabs our attention because it is quick and sometimes destructive, but slow changes also shape our future in profound ways. Keep an eye on both.

The future is shaped by external forces.

We can sometimes struggle to think about things outside of our immediate control, assuming, for example, that we have more control in our careers than perhaps we do. It is important to pay attention to external forces, like the technological, societal, political, and economic impacts that may influence our work. Pay attention to the external forces that may influence your position.

No one can predict the future, but we can all influence it.

Thinking about the future can be challenging, and it can be overwhelming to think about all the possible future paths your career could take. Considering the future in terms of what is plausible and what is preferred can help you to narrow down some of those potential paths. We all have a role in shaping our future, and planning for your future career is a way to craft the future you want.

Here are some questions that can guide you in implementing futures thinking in career planning:

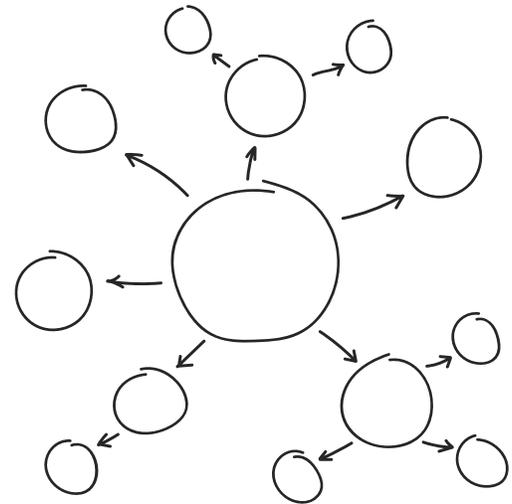
- What will your library be like in five years, 10 years, and 15 years?
- What are some of the biggest changes we can imagine in library work, and what would it be like to work in that future?
- What new and different problems will library staff face in the future?

Activities

Individual Activities

Mind map (source: [Workshop Tactics](#))

Fill a page with your thoughts by creating an interconnected map of ideas. Start with one thing and let your ideas branch off and lead to new and unexpected ones. Grab a piece of paper and a pen. Write a topic or question at the center of the page, then brainstorm related ideas and questions around it in an interconnected map.



You could use a mind map to generate ideas around:

- Career change: Explore your options for a change in the type of job you have or the kind of library you work in. Your map might lead you to find what it is you really value in a job, and that might direct you somewhere new.
- Career enhancement: A mind map is a great tool for listing all your options when considering moving up or increasing responsibility in your organization. This exercise will help you to reveal what you enjoy doing the most and where you'd like to go next.
- Career exploration: Maybe you just want to learn more about what options are available? A mind map can help with that, too.

Premortem (source: [Workshop Tactics](#))

Think about all the things that could go wrong so you can effectively plan to stop them from happening. What's the worst that could happen? Now's the time to figure that out.

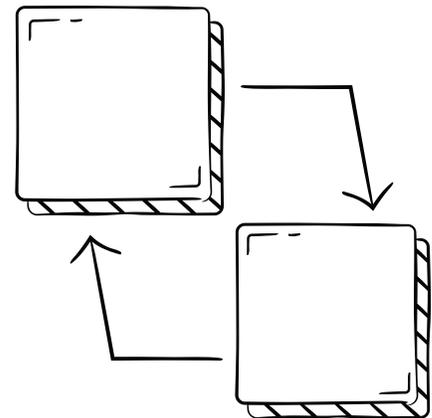
- Consider your current career development plan, then imagine that you have leapt forward in time and discovered that your plans have failed spectacularly.

- Write down every reason you can think of for why your plans failed on sticky notes. One by one, think through each possibility and group them by theme.
- Create a plan to mitigate the most certain possibilities and to investigate the most uncertain ones. This will help you be ready to prevent and prepare for any possible future failure.

Sticky Steps (source: [Workshop Tactics](#))

Start with your goal and work backwards to give yourself a clear path to get to your goal.

- Write your goal as far to the right on your drawing surface or whiteboard as possible. This goal is your desired end-state.
- Ask yourself, “What would have to happen just before this for me to succeed?” Write the answer on a sticky note and place it just to the left of your goal.
- Ask the same question for the sticky note you’ve just placed, “What would have to happen just before this for me to succeed?”
- Repeat this process until you have stepped all the way back to the present.
- Now you can make a plan to start on the first thing needed to achieve your goal.

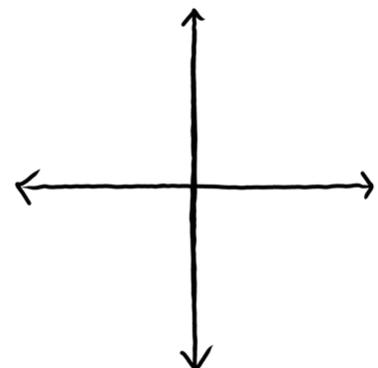


Group/Department Activities

Priority map (source: [Workshop Tactics](#))

Find out where to focus based on what’s important to the group.

- On a whiteboard or large piece of paper, draw a large plus sign. This is the base of your map.
- To label the map, pick two criteria your participants find important. Here are some commonly used examples:
 - Impact vs. Effort
 - Risk vs. Knowledge
 - Urgency vs. Importance
 - Library Needs vs. User Needs
 - Cost vs. Problem

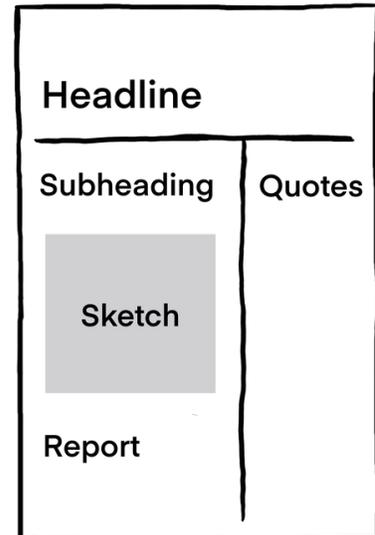


- Plot your items (using sticky notes) on the map by ranking them with the criteria you've selected. For example, you could plot program ideas as impact versus effort.

Newspaper Headline (source: [Workshop Tactics](#))

Think about your organization's future by predicting a front-page newspaper article about your organization.

- Have each participant divide a piece of paper into five sections and label them: headline, subheading, sketch, report, and quotes.
 - **Headline** - Describe the wonderful success of the organization in one attention-grabbing headline.
 - **Subheading** - Reveal more about what the story is about in one to two sentences.
 - **Sketch** - Draw something that supports the story.
 - **Report** - In bullet points, detail some highlights of the story.
 - **Quotes** - Come up with some fictional quotes from people about the accomplishments of your organization.
- Tell the group they are going to predict the future. Explain each section and ask them to complete it.
- Once everyone has completed the activity, encourage everyone to share their future vision. Pay attention to common themes and reflect on how those might be condensed into a common goal.

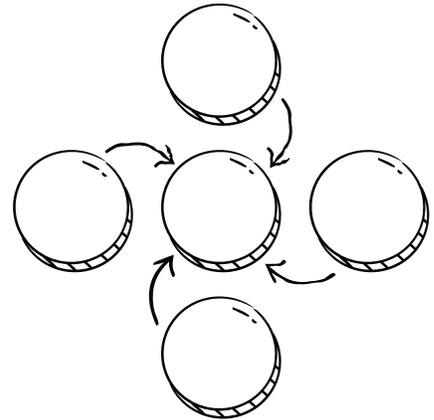


Reverse Brainstorm (Source: [Workshop Tactics](#))

Think of the worst, most despicable ideas possible, then reverse them to find a solution.

- Identify and write down your problem on a large surface so it's clear for everyone to see.
- Reverse the problem. For example:
 - **Problem:** How might we increase customer satisfaction?
 - **Anti-Problem:** How might we increase customer dissatisfaction?

- Generate ideas for the anti-problem quickly. Try to come up with eight different ideas in eight minutes, making yourself only take one minute for each idea.
- Share the ideas, then collect them and randomly distribute them back to the group.
- Ask the group to reverse the ideas they've been given. These will now become real solutions for the actual problem. For example:
 - Anti-solution: Not returning customer calls immediately upon a call request.
 - Real solution: Returning customer calls immediately upon a call request.
- Do it again and gather even more ideas, or evaluate what you've got.



Resources

Web Resources

WebJunction

In addition to creating and delivering training for library staff, WebJunction designs projects and delivers transformational programs that connect public library service to community needs, such as lifelong learning, health and wellness, and economic success. Look for these courses:

- Flexible Spaces - Flexible Futures
- Envisioning Future Library Experiences
- Future Proofing Library Spaces
- How Successful Libraries Thrive in Uncertain Times

Programming Librarian

Programming Librarian is a place for library professionals to share, learn, and be inspired to present excellent programming for their communities. Look for resources like:

- Webinar: [Media Literacy for Adults: Meeting Patrons Where They Are](#)
- Program Model: [Humanities Topical Immersion Programming](#)

Articles & Books

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Additional resources are available in Chapter 5: Additional Resources.

Additional Resources

Books & Articles

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Organizations

Institute for the Future - the world's leading foresight education and futures organization.

- **Foresight Essentials** - a series of trainings on futures thinking.
- **Voices of Workable Futures** - learn from seven new worker archetypes who are transforming the working landscape.
- **Featured projects** - a list of currently featured projects from this organization.

Teach the Future - a global non profit organization that promotes futures literacy as a life skill for students and teachers.

- **Library** - find free and paid resources in the resource library.
- **Young Voices Network** - developing a community of young innovators and futurists, open to anyone aged 12-25.

The Futures School - a global development ecosystem whose mission is to democratize foresight.

- **Learning events** - a list of live online, in-person, on-demand, and free training resources.
- **Resource center** - download free digital readers, trend cards, worksheets, and templates, plus printed materials can also be purchased.

Library Futures - one of the leading digital library policy and advocacy organizations. A project of The Engelberg Center on Innovation Law & Policy at NYU Law.

Hawai'i Research Center for Future Studies - part of the Department of Political Science, College of Social Sciences at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and established by the Hawaii State Legislature in 1971. It is one of the world's most renowned institutions for futures research, consulting, and education.

Center for the Future of Libraries - part of the American Library Association and launched in 2014, the Center for the Future of Libraries works to identify emerging trends relevant to libraries and the communities they serve, promote futuring and innovation techniques to help librarians and library professional shape their future, and build connections with experts and innovative thinkers to help libraries address emerging issues.

University of Houston Foresight Program - the University of Houston provides a world-class Masters-level program on foresight as well as an abbreviated certificate program.

- **Professional Certificate in Foresight**
- **Master of Science in Foresight**

The Millennium Project - an independent non profit global participatory futures research think tank of futurists, scholars, business planners, and policy makers who work for international organizations, governments, corporations, NGOs, and universities.

- **State of the Future reports**

Association of Professional Futurists - a global community of futurists dedicated to promoting professional excellence and demonstrating the value of strategic foresight and futures studies.

International Futures Forum - a charity with a mission to enable people and organizations to flourish in powerful times.

Search Terms

Futures thinking is sometimes also known as futures studies, strategic foresight, futures research, futurism, futurology, foresight, or change literacy.

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